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ABSTRACT

By examing the works of classic American authors, this book presents the idea that individual human beings can break free of the structures of thought into which they are born and that, by reimagining the world, can change it. In chapters on Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, Edith Wharton, Richard Wright, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Abraham Lincoln, and others, what is shown is how each writer enlarged the expressive range of the American language and the imagined sense of American possibilities. The book contends that each writer tried to create what might be called a democratic prose style expressing the belief in transcendence that remains at the core of the American imagination. Besides the aforementioned authors, the book discusses the works of Theodore Dreiser, Kate Chopin, Henry Adams, Zora Neale Hurston, and Stephen Crane. The final chapter in the book discusses the situation in today's universities, where literature is talked about and studied, but not enjoyed. (NKA)

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